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Highway projects move ahead

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PHOENIX - With the federal transportation-funding crisis apparently resolved for this year, the Arizona Department of Transportation will advance six federal-aid highway projects across the state that had been placed on hold.

Gov. Janet Napolitano and ADOT officials, however, warn that the lack of a long-term solution for federal transportation funding threatens the future of travel and safety improvements in Arizona and throughout the nation.

The \$8 billion one-year fix of the federal Highway Trust Fund was signed by President Bush Sept. 15. Napolitano says Arizona knows that the move is only a temporary repair of a broken funding system.

"Without adequate funding, Arizona cannot move forward with improvements that local communities and citizens have told us support," Napolitano said. "We need leadership from Washington to provide the states with critical funding for projects that can ease congestion, help drive our economy and make travel safer."

The U.S. Department of Transportation last week announced the Highway Trust Fund would be out of money by the end of the year. ADOT Director Victor Mendez said without a reliable funding source, ADOT would have placed a hold on new projects scheduled to use federal funding to pay for construction, refusing to carry federal debt based on IOUs.

"The one-year fix has been approved, so we're going to move forward with federally-funded projects," said Mendez, past president of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. "This crisis didn't happen overnight. Congress and federal agencies need to be more innovative and work on diverse solutions to pay for improvements that are vital to our transportation system and the quality of life."

In 2007, Arizona received approximately \$650 million in federal aid for highways, local roads, bridges and public transit. For every dollar that motor vehicle travelers spend in Arizona on federal gas taxes, the state gets back about 92 cents.

The six federally funded highway projects that had been on hold have an economic impact of more than \$150 million. Plans call for the projects, listed below, to start construction within the next six months.

- US 93 widening near Hoover Dam: \$107 million
- State Route 85 widening north of Gila Bend: \$23.9 million
- US 60 widening between Globe and Superior: \$9.2 million
- I-17 McGuireville interchange north of Camp Verde: \$8.9 million
- US 60 widening near Wickenburg: \$5.6 million
- I-10/I-19 interchange landscaping near Tucson: \$4 million